Telephone interview with Griffin Murphey, dentist during Operation Frequent Wind, April-May 1975. Conducted by Jan K. Herman, Historian of the Navy Medical Department, 26 January 2009.

Did you have any kind of orientation when you joined the Navy?

They sent me to Newport. I went the summer of my senior dental school year. It was abbreviate. I already knew a lot about the military from Army ROTC. It was really pretty much like a fun party. They had me march some of the guys around.

Where was your first assignment?

Okinawa, the 3rd Marine Division. They put me on a plane and sent me straight over there. I essentially got out of dental school and went straight to Okinawa.

At some point you ended up participating in Operation Frequent Wind. How did that all come about?

I was doing operative dentistry in the clinic. Folks who had already done it, kept telling me it would be a good idea to sign up for a float. At a certain point, I decided to sign up for a float. CAPT Hyde, who was the commander of the 3rd Dental Company, came up to the dental clinic and he said, "You and Sudderth are going out with the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines to Vietnam for this operation." He didn't give me any further information about it. I don't believe he used the word evacuation. I remember extending my hand to shake his hand and he didn't shake my hand. Perhaps that was a custom of his. I was surprised that he didn't take my hand. I ran back to the Q and began packing everything up.

Was this in March of '75?

Yes. In fact, 2 weeks before Easter Sunday, we had the go but it was cancelled. I think it was Easter Sunday of 1975. I was hanging with the corpsmen waiting to fly out to the USS *Dubuque*. I have a picture of me standing in front of one of the CH-46s that lifted us.

So they flew us out to the ship. The next few days we headed toward Vietnam. COL [Al] Gray, later General Gray, Commandant of the Marine Corps, was our regimental commander.

Did they tell you what you were going to do?

They said we were going to transfer us to the USS *Durham* and go pick up refugees. They kept talking about US nationals and a lot of Vietnamese. The *Dubuque*, to me, was not a real clean ship, and the crew didn't seem a lot in the way of morale. Because we didn't have internet, they took these large sheets of paper out of the teletypes and tape them up in the passageways and that's how everyone got the news.

So they transferred us over to the *Durham*. I was so impressed with that ship. It was so clean, mid-1960s built. It was just gorgeous.

I think it was the 4th or 5th of April that we arrived off Phan Rang and started picking people up. It was just a mass of people in every kind of boat that you can imagine--fishing boats, sampans. And they brought everything. They brought TV sets, motorcycles. Of course, we wouldn't let them bring that stuff on the ship. And they had tons of guns. Then we started getting waves of Vietnamese army deserters and some South Vietnamese Marine Corps

deserters. A lot of them had their girlfriends or their wives with them. It was just a mass of people all over the ship.

How did you deal with that?

The after battle dressing station was primarily the area where we were. That's where they would send anybody who needed any medical attention. I didn't really have a whole lot to do at that time. Occasionally, when someone showed up with an injury and there was no one to look at them, I'd look at them. I remember irrigating some little buckshot type wounds that I think were probably from a claymore or something. I saw another guy who had fallen down a ladder, which peeled back this big flap of skin on the dorsum of his foot. I sutured that back in place. The ship's doctor, Dr. Sachse, was watching me and said, "That's not clean enough! You need to scrub that some more. So I kept scrubbing it.

So you were not being a dentist at this point. You were assigned to other duties.

I had one guy who fell down a ladder and broke off a lateral incisor into the nerve. Rather than try to do anything with it, I just took it out. That was my only dental procedure. I really felt relieved that I had something dental to do.

One memory stands out. I had a break and had nothing to do. A announcement came over the 1MC saying that lunch was being served in the officers' wardroom. So I went up and had lunch. Here were these marvelously uniformed white-coated stewards serving us a beautiful Mexican lunch with refried beans, tacos in real taco shells. And I was sitting there thinking: Here's this mass of squalid humanity down on the main deck and I've got this lovely lunch that would cost me several dollars back in Fort Worth, TX.

Several times the captain would come on the 1MC talking about the possibility of North Vietnamese missile boats and such. But we had Marines aboard manning .50 calibers.

Were you concerned about local security on the ship?

That's true. There was a lot of concern about that. Would we be fragged? Were there any Viet Cong among the refugees? So they disarmed everyone who came aboard. There wasn't supposed to be anything aboard that could harm anyone. That was interesting. The Vietnamese carried their gold in thin sheets that looked like copper. After a while the Marines were talking among themselves. "Oh, yeah, we were out searching them on the boat and found all this copper and we just threw that over the side."

There was one incident that I could report. My dental tech was walking athwart ships through the superstructure and he went over the port side. We were picking people up on the starboard side. He saw a unit 1 medical bag lying on the deck. A couple of South Vietnamese corpsmen had been allowed to come aboard carrying those things. He looked inside and saw some M26 hand frags. So he just picked it up and tossed it over the side, which might not have been the smartest thing to do because it could have been booby trapped. He reported it to me and I put him for a Navy Achievement Medal but it got absolutely nowhere.

These refugees you were picking up at this time were from the cities in the north were falling to the NVA, not those who were fleeing Saigon.

That's true. There's not really much in the history books about it and it was kind of unique. My understanding is that we picked up over 3,000 people. We stayed there for 2 full

days. I think we left on the evening of the 6th or the 7th. The night before we left there was a lot of fire going on ashore--lots of flares, lots of artillery. And it was close enough to see.

You were still off Phan Ranh at that time?

Yes. It was part of Cam Ranh Bay. There were Vietnamese naval vessels pass us. There were motor gunboats and some ex-US Coast Guard cutters painted black, which was kind of weird.

Once we filled up with people, we went down to Vung Tau and transferred them to a Military Sealift ship. One of them was the Transcolorado. We unloaded them at Vung Tau at the mouth of the Saigon River.

Where did you go after you dropped off the refugees?

That same day, we were helicoptered off and went to the Blue Ridge. I spent several days aboard. After that we were put on the Duluth. That was a helicopter evolution as well. When we got to Subic Bay, we were held in reserve. That was the end of the Vietnam evacuation for us.